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SUBJECT: UNPRECEDENTED PUBLIC DISSENT IN CAMEROON'S RULING PARTY

Classified By: Political Officer Tad Brown for reason 1.4 (B and D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The longstanding image of President Paul Biya's ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) as a disciplined monolith was shaken when veteran CPDM official and National Assembly representative Adama Modi publicly opposed the CPDM's candidate during August 31 elections for the Speaker of the National Assembly. Cavaye Yeguie Djibril was easily reelected to a sixteenth one-year term, but not until after an unprecedeted public display of party indiscipline. Press speculation of a "CPDM rebellion" is overblown, but the incident reflects a growing level of discontent among party faithful and the nation with the CPDM's authoritarian strictures that will likely crescendo with the approach of the anticipated 2011 succession to Biya.

End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Speaker of the National Assembly is the constitutionally designated successor in case of an unexpected vacancy in the Presidency for a period of 45 days to allow for new elections. For his previous 15 one-year terms as Speaker, Cavaye Yeguie Djibril was pre-selected by a meeting of a CPDM steering committee, essentially on instructions from Biya in his capacity as party president, and his selection before the CPDM-controlled National Assembly was a foregone conclusion. There had been tremendous speculation as to whether Cavaye would be proposed for another term. He had garnered unwelcome press attention during the 2007 parliamentary and municipal elections for his offer to pay 100,000 CFA (about \$200) to those CPDM district heads who delivered 100 percent turnout in favor of the CPDM, and some commentators called for his prosecution for having violated electoral laws that prohibit offering inducements for votes. Cavaye is widely perceived to be unpopular among his supposed constituency in the north where, in any event, the CPDM lost ground to the opposition National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) party in the 2007 elections. Perhaps more significantly, a rumored campaign by notables from Cameroon's northern provinces to forfeit the Speaker position in favor of having a northerner as Prime Minister (which has gone to an Anglophone in recent cabinets) fueled speculation that Cavaye might be jettisoned.

¶3. (SBU) Nevertheless, no one anticipated that the CPDM's (and Biya's) choice, once made, would face any public debate from within the party. When Cavaye's candidacy was presented to the Assembly on August 31, however, Adama Modi, a former Secretary of State in the Ministry of Territorial

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Administration and a CPDM representative from the Extreme North Province, voiced his objection, which sparked applause

from some opposition and CPDM MPs. Press reports indicate that CPDM heavyweights, including ministers from Cameroon's northern provinces and senior party leaders, were called to the National Assembly to inveigh personally on Modi to drop his opposition. In the end, Modi stormed out of the chamber as the election went forward. Cavaye was re-elected with 130 votes and 13 abstentions within the CPDM party caucus.

¶4. (C) In a September 4 meeting with Charge, Prime Minister Inoni characterized Modi's opposition (and presumably, some of the support shown by other MPs) as "unprecedented" and attributed it to the desire among northern officials to pass over the position of Speaker of the Assembly in favor of the Prime Minister slot.

¶5. (C) Comment. Biya's decision to retain Cavaye may reflect his desire to have a known, loyal agent at Parliament's helm, regardless of Cavaye's baggage. While Modi's public opposition to Biya's will could not have been predicted, certainly the CPDM leadership knew it would face criticism for sticking with Cavaye despite his campaign gaffes and general unpopularity. Inoni's offered explanation does not tell the whole story; Modi's unprecedented outburst is more than just regional politicking. The CPDM grassroots are increasingly chafing at the party's centralized leadership and demanding a larger role in party decisions. We saw this during the CPDM primaries for the 2007 elections, and it appears to be gaining strength. Increasingly, all eyes will be on the anticipated presidential succession in 2011 - unless Biya uses his large parliamentary majority and handpicked Speaker to change the constitution so he can run for another term. Either way, internal jockeying for power within the CPDM will likely increase. End comment.

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